

House Republican Press Release

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Transportation Improvements Moving Forward



By State Rep. Toni Boucher, R-143, Wilton, Norwalk

“There be three things which make a nation great and prosperous: a fertile soil, busy workshops, easy conveyance for men and goods from place to place.”
(Francis Bacon- 1561-1626)

Great things can happen when both sides agree and combine their ideas and efforts to make things happen. This is exactly what occurred in passing House Bill 5844. This bill includes significant transportation improvements for the second year in a row by combining the Governor’s proposals, the Speaker’s proposals and even a few of my proposals to upgrade the Norwalk-Danbury rail line.

The Connecticut state legislature approved a 10-year, \$2.3-billion transportation package that is designed to improve both highways and rail operations and make up some ground that we have been losing to our neighboring states to the south.

In addition to new initiatives, the bill funds projects that have been identified for several years, including those discussed at a transportation summit last year. This package follows Gov. M. Jodi Rell’s \$1.3 transportation initiative last year that included funding for 342 new rail cars on Metro-North’s New Haven commuter rail line.

These transportation actions will produce meaningful benefits to the movement of people and cargo, as well as improve the economic future of our region and the state.

Most important to us locally, this legislation will allow completion of new signals and switching systems on the Danbury line, so it will no longer be necessary for the engineer to get off the train to manually pull a switch. This branch line, through Norwalk and Wilton, will also see right-of-way upgrades and possible re-electrification. We also hope to see improved equipment, infrastructure and service on this vital transportation corridor--a goal many of us have been pursuing for years.

These much-anticipated projects should bring back riders to the Danbury line and ease the pressure on other stations on Metro-North’s New Haven Line. No longer will people have to drive over the New York state line to board the Harlem commuter line.

These transportation improvements will generate economic activity and assist businesses along the rail lines, particularly in the Merritt 7 corridor and Danbury metro area -- and also the smaller but significant towns in between. Many readers may not be aware that Redding will be constructing a new town center that notably will also include a rail stop.

Unlike many other bills, this legislation is aptly titled, An Act Concerning the Roadmap for Connecticut's Economic Future. Much of our southwestern Connecticut region is held back from future economic growth and job creation because of our outdated and overcrowded transportation system.

As has been said many times before, these improvements will help small businesses, as well as workers, in Fairfield County, by helping employees and customers reach their destinations more easily.

Fairfield County has become almost a transportation dead end. People have avoided taking jobs here in part because of traffic congestion, especially during morning and evening peak travel times. I have made the case on the House floor just last week that 90,000 small businesses are located in lower Fairfield County, 30,000 more than the next largest county, and that scarce transportation dollars should follow those jobs.

Many of us on both sides of the political aisle from Fairfield County have become a chorus, speaking out and working hard to secure these transportation funds, especially those of us who serve on the Transportation Committee. We are anticipating that this legislation will provide benefits for families and businesses over the coming years.

Among the provision of the bill are:

- Improvements to New Haven Line rail stations and parking lots
- Upgrading Danbury, New Canaan and Waterbury branch lines taking some burden off New Haven main line stations
- Reviving commuter rail service from New Haven north to Hartford, Bradley Airport and Springfield, Massachusetts, easing highway congestion
- Improving Bridgeport Harbor for barge service to ease truck traffic on I-95
- Possible improvements to congested sections of I-95 east of Branford
- Increasing service on the Shoreline East railroad from New Haven to New London, connecting with ferry service.

It is a pleasure to report some good news for a change. I hope to bring you more at the end of this legislation session which will conclude at midnight May 3, if all goes well--that is.

State Rep. Toni Boucher serves the 143rd Assembly District of Wilton and Norwalk in the state House of Representatives. If you would like to contact her with comments and suggestions, she can be reached at her Capitol office at 1-800-842-1423.